

Ethan's Story

COLLEGE STUDENT & DJ

Ethan Schroeder is a highly-involved college student, balancing school, a social life and work. As a DJ at The U, University of Missouri – St. Louis' student radio station, he plays top 40 hits and gives entertaining reviews of the latest blockbusters. Passionate about dance, Ethan helps children learn how to dance at Stages St. Louis. He lives on campus, sharing quarters with three other students. Ethan also has Down syndrome, but that fact has never defined him.



Beth, Ethan's mom, never thought college was an option for Ethan after he was diagnosed with Down syndrome. As a single mom, she handled his cognitive and developmental challenges alone. Beth moved to St. Louis for a job when Ethan was 7 and had no family or friends to go to for help. After seeking support groups for families caring for a child with Down syndrome, Beth discovered St. Louis Arc. A United Way partner agency, St. Louis Arc offers services and resources that help to empower people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. "I didn't know what to expect, moving to a new place with Ethan and not knowing anyone. It made such a difference to receive the support and help from St. Louis Arc," Beth said.

St. Louis Arc's impact on Beth and Ethan's lives began through respite. The Arc first offered Beth short-term support; however, within that first year of living in St. Louis, it quickly became the go-to for helping Beth navigate raising a child with Down syndrome.

As Ethan grew up, Arc helped him become involved in the community through summer programs designed to assist him in developing job and social skills to employment training that allowed him to gain work experience prior to high school graduation. St. Louis Arc was there for Ethan when he graduated from Marquette High and continues to support him as he attends the University of Missouri – St. Louis' SUCCEED program.

SUCCEED was created in fall 2013 in partnership with St. Louis Arc and is designed as a post-secondary program for people with intellectual and development disabilities. Ethan enrolled as one of SUCCEED's first students and is thriving in his second and final year of the program. "I learn a lot of job skills in my classes," Ethan said. "SUCCEED helps me to feel independent and learn things on my own."

From vocational studies to career development, Ethan is gaining many valuable skills through SUCCEED. He also is working on identifying and achieving his goals for the future. "I want to have my own apartment and have a job I like," Ethan said. "I'm working on time and stress management skills so I can get closer to becoming independent." Ethan currently interns at Down Syndrome Association of Greater St. Louis where he learns how to file and answer phones. Naturally welcoming, Ethan also enjoys mentoring students new to the SUCCEED program and answering questions about navigating college. Through it all, Ethan is determined to make the most of his college experience. "When Ethan gets a job, he keeps a job," Beth said. "Everyone appreciates his work ethic and skill set, which largely came from the support of Arc."

St. Louis Arc helped Ethan conquer his and Beth's doubts about the future. "Twenty-three years ago I would've never thought he would go to college. It's amazing to see what he's accomplished and imagine how far he will go."

About St. Louis Arc St. Louis Arc empowers people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families to lead better lives by providing a lifetime of high-quality services, family support and advocacy. St. Louis Arc has been a United Way funded agency since 1955.

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